

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

meet them, and, with radiant countenance, falling on her knees before their leader, said : " I am Catherine ; do to me whatever God will permit, but I charge you, in the name of the Almighty, to hurt none of these who are with me." The ruffian hesitated, and then bade her go away. " Why should I fly," she answered, " when I have found what I desired ? I offer myself a living sacrifice to my eternal Bridegroom. If you are sent to kill me, act boldly ; I shall not move from here ; but harm none of my companions." At this the whole band went away in confusion; but when her companions gathered round her, rejoicing that she had escaped their hands, she wept bitterly, saying that she had thought that God was about to grant her the red rose of martyrdom, but now saw that her sins had deprived her of it. " I tell you," she wrote to Fra Raimondo, ^{tc} that to-day I wish to begin anew, in order that my sins may not draw me back from the great bliss of giving my life for Christ crucified."

" My desire was not fulfilled of giving my life for the truth and for the sweet Spouse of Christ. But the eternal Bridegroom played a great trick upon me, as Cristofano will tell you fully by word of mouth. Needs must I weep, because so great has been the multitude of my iniquities that I did not merit that my blood should give life, nor illumine the blinded minds, nor pacify the son with the father, nor to build up a stone with my blood in the mystical body of Holy Church. Nay, it seemed that the hands were bound of him who wished to do it. And when I said: *I am she; take me and let this family be;* my words were knives that straightway pierced his heart. O my father, do you, too, feel wondrous joy, because never have I experienced in myself such mysteries with so great joy. Here was the sweetness of truth ; here was the gladness of an upright and pure conscience ; here was tasted the time of the new martyrs, as you know, foretold by the eternal Truth. No tongue would suffice to tell the greatness of the bliss my soul feels. For this I think myself so bound to my Creator that, if I were to give my body to burn, it seems not to me that I could make adequate return for so great a grace as I and my beloved sons and daughters have received.